

Message from the Editors

The past month was characterized for us at our (virtual) BiBa Headquarters by giving advice on how to find a place to live in Magdeburg, advising our new BiBas on getting their Student Visas for Germany, and generally preparing for events to be held in the Fall.

This issue's "Spotlight on Professors" features Prof. Christian Hansen, who was just promoted to Full Professor for Virtual and Augmented Reality and works on computer-assisted surgery.

A bilingual bachelor's program with German and English is inherently international. While our international students are immersed in German when in Magdeburg, we need a second leg to stand on for immersion in English. To this end, we are proud to introduce in this issue our BiBa partner university in the English-speaking world as a "home away from home" for our students to go to in 3rd year if they so desire. It is Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador in St. John's, Canada, in particular the Computer Science Department. In fact, we'll find a couple of familiar faces there.

As usual, lots is happening with respect to culture in Magdeburg. You will find out about a particular highlight in the City's calendar, the Urban Dance Festival 2024 being held through to Oct. 6th – enough time for parts to be taken in by our BiBas attending the prep-courses. Part of the festival is the official Hip-Hop and Break Dance World Championships, certainly an eye-popping event to keep you on your toes!

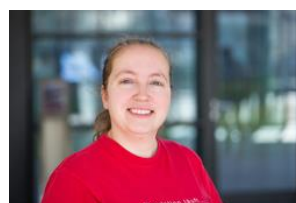
You will also find out about an important German tradition: the infamous Oktoberfest! And you'll get the background on the first two public holidays of the new academic year: Oct. 3rd (Day of German Unity) and Oct. 31st (Reformation Day).

Thank you to our readers who have given us feedback on previous issues of the BiBa Newsletter. One suggestion, which we got from BiBa Nour Elsayed, a member of our Class of 2028, was to include a calendar of events which are particularly relevant for BiBas. Turn to page 7 and: Voilà! Thank you for your feedback, Nour. We will consider making it a regular feature of our Newsletter from here on in. New is also a table of links to further information as QR-codes.

By the time we produce the next BiBa Newsletter, the Semester will have started. We would like to wish all BiBas a safe journey to Magdeburg and a good start into your university education with us. Gute Reise, bon voyage!

Enjoy!

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Skyline of St. John's, Newfoundland, home of our Canadian partner university, Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland and Labrador (center).

Courtesy of Memorial University

Spotlight on Professors: Prof. Dr. Christian Hansen

Christian Hansen is a Full Professor for Virtual and Augmented Reality in the Department of Simulation and Graphics in the Faculty of Computer Science.

Christian was born and raised in Frankfurt (Main), where he attended High School (“Gymnasium”), specializing in technical subjects.

When it came to choosing a university in 2000, he first looked at the rankings of Computer Science departments in an issue of the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* from 1999 and saw that the No. 1 at the time, the University of Magdeburg, had a new degree program in Computational Visualistics. “The combination of computer science with visualization for medical applications was exactly what fit my interests”, he says of his ambitions at the time. One thing led to another, and he enrolled in that program, never looked back and finished it in 2006.

Interested in applied research, he then went to the Fraunhofer-Institute for Digital Medicine MEVIS in Bremen. Fraunhofer Institutes form a link between basic research of universities and the needs of industry in the form of products. The Fraunhofer Society has some 76 Institutes spread all over Germany with a handful abroad with some 32,000 scientists in total. He did his doctorate during this time at the private Jacobs University in Bremen, graduating in 2012.

Christian Hansen then came back to Magdeburg as a Junior Professor, where he joined the SIMULATE Research Campus funded by an annual grant of about 2 Mill. Euros from the German federal Ministry of Education and



Courtesy of Christian Hansen

Research. The campus’ goal is to improve health care through innovative image-based methods. STIMULATE works together in particular with the offshoot Siemens Healthcare GmbH of one of Germany’s largest technology companies, Siemens AG.

Christian specializes in Virtual and Augmented Reality for planning and training for medical operations. He was promoted to Full Professor effective Sept. 1, 2024 – indeed, it’s not too late to congratulate him!

An example of the images he works with is shown below. It shows an augmented reality visualization developed by his team that can be used in the operating room to guide surgical instruments.



Courtesy of Christian Hansen

Projective augmented reality visualization to guide surgeons during complex procedures, developed at the STIMULATE research campus.

Christian hopes that the new BiBas will be just as excited about the university and its possibilities as he has been ever since he first set foot on Magdeburg almost a quarter of a century ago. Indeed, it is possible to include many courses from computational visualistics in the BiBa, for example his course on Virtual / Augmented Reality and Interactive Systems, or courses on computer graphics (generating images from geometric models), image processing (figuring out what a given picture contains), and information visualization (presenting text or numbers as pictures). Christian is convinced that computational visualistics is just as relevant and innovative a subject to study today as it was when he was an undergraduate. And who knows, maybe you’ll be in or come back to Magdeburg to stay for good, like it turned out for him. Certainly, coming to Magdeburg was a game-changer for him!

Exchange Partner in Canada: Memorial University of New- foundland and Labrador (MUN)

The BiBa program has highlighted the Faculty of Computer Science's need for a stable partner in an English-speaking environment to accept internationally mobile students wanting to enrich their university experience.

In 2023, an exchange partnership between the OVGU Magdeburg and the Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (MUN) in St. John's, Canada, was worked out and approved by both universities. OVGU and MUN are of similar size, with 18,000 students at MUN and 13,000 at OVGU, and structure, each having strong engineering faculties, humanities, and medicine and departments such as computer science and mathematics in the Faculty of Science. In computer science, both institutions have around 20 professors covering similar modern subjects.

The idea is that BiBa students should have the possibility in their third year to attend classes at MUN for one term to experience education in an English-speaking country, while being immersed in the second language of their university education.

St. John's metropolitan area with its population of about 213,000 is a tad smaller than Magdeburg (with a population of around 238,000). St. John's location is unique: It is a picturesque, tight-knit city nestled between a scenic harbour and the surrounding hills.



View of St. John's, Newfoundland.

Courtesy of Memorial University

It is the Eastern-most city in North America – the spot closest to Europe. It was for this reason that the pioneer of radio signals, Guglielmo Marconi, in 1901 chose what is today called Signal Hill (see above) in St. John's as the North American end for the first transatlantic wireless transmission.



Signal Hill outside St. John's

John's as the North American end for the first transatlantic wireless transmission.

With a bit of luck, you'll see an iceberg passing by the coast, or at least lots of ice (see to the right). Still today St. John's gets heavy snow-fall (up to a meter at once) several times each Winter, usually bringing the city – and some times even the airport, to a standstill. This can last anywhere from a few hours to a few days and can significantly disrupt transportation in and out of the region. St. John's is on an island which it takes about 8 hours to traverse by car and where you occasionally encounter small communities.



Entrance to St. John's harbour on a cold winter's day.

St. John's is small enough as a city that, in the words of a restaurant owner there, "everybody seems to know everybody else", but it's large enough that "you can avoid one another if you wish." Professional hockey has a long tradition in St. John's, though their team, the Newfoundland Growlers, are not playing this season. But there's plenty of intervarsity sports to watch, like basketball and volleyball.

The Newfoundland Growlers hockey team shown here playing in the 2023/24 season. They are not playing in the current season.



The Newfoundland Growlers hockey team shown here playing in the 2023/24 season. They are not playing in the current season.



Dr. Adrian Fiech, responsible contact person at MUN for the exchange with OVGU.

On the St. John's end of the exchange, Dr. Adrian Fiech is the person responsible. Adrian is originally from Poland and got his university education in computer science at the University of Dortmund, his PhD at Kansas State University. He has been a faculty at MUN since 1995, where he teaches, for example, programming languages and software engineering. He has served his Department in various capacities, including being the Graduate Chairperson taking care of the MSc and PhD programs. He was the Chairman of the Computer Science Department when the exchange agreement with BiBa was prepared.

The Computer Science program being offered at MUN is taught in part by Dr. Lourdes Peña-Castillo (specializing in Bioinformatics) and Dr. Oscar Meruvia-Pastor (specializing in virtual reality and computer graphics), both of whom earned their PhDs in Computer Science at OVGU back in the early 2000s.



Dr. Lourdes Peña-Castillo (in Computer Science and Biology) and Dr. Oscar Meruvia-Pastor (in Computer Science), faculty members at MUN, in front of the skeleton of a blue whale, a permanent exhibition spanning several stories in the atrium of their new Core Science Facility.

© 2024 Oscar Meruvia-Pastor

Culture in Magdeburg

September and October are full of exciting events in Magdeburg, so we'll only be able to bring you short blurbs on the most important ones – even though each deserves a column of its own. Check out the home pages by scanning the QR-Codes at the end the newsletter, and avoid hassles by buy tickets online in advance.

One of the highlights is the [Urban Dance Festival](#) running until Oct. 6th at different venues all around Magde-

burg and includes the official World Championship in Hip-Hop and Break Dance.



For some events, a hefty admission fee is charged, but there are also great events which are for free.

On Sept. 28th, [Culture Night](#) will brighten up Magdeburg's Breiter Weg, the main shopping drag, or boardwalk, from Alter Markt

(Market Square) to the north up to the Opera House, as of 6 pm. This night features around 40 events along Breiter



Weg, from classical art to contemporary performances, including exhibitions, tango dancing, magic shows, and sand painting. Admission is half price for students (8.75 Euros), a great and inexpensive way to spend the evening!

From Sept. 27th to Nov. 17th, the large park across the river from the university, Elbauenpark, becomes a vivid wonder-



land with the [LUMAGICA Light-World](#), featuring mesmerizing LED sculptures that create a truly magical experience at night. Tickets are normally expensive (21 Euros for an evening, and only marginally less expensive for students), but quite a bit cheaper for groups of 10 or more, and if you go during the week.

Public Holidays Coming Up

On public holidays in Germany, almost all stores and businesses are closed. Sometimes even museums, swimming pools and cinemas are closed, depending on the holiday. But sometimes there are special celebrations.

Day of German Unity

Every country has its national holiday: In the United States it's July 4th, in Canada it's July 1, in Albania it's Nov. 28th. And in Germany it's Oct. 3rd. This day has been celebrated since 1990, the year that the former German Democratic Republic ("East Germany") and the Federal Republic of Germany ("West Germany") were reunited.

While there was immense jubilation when the Berlin Wall fell on Nov. 9, 1989, the unification of the two countries turned out to be a painful process for many in the former East. Most companies went bankrupt, unemployment skyrocketed, and many people left the East for the West, particularly young people. To this day, there are big differences between life and attitudes in the East compared to the West. We won't expand on that here, it's a topic for a good history lesson.

The federal government commemorates the day in the capital of one of the 16 federal states. This year, 2024, it's Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania's turn to host the celebrations in Schwerin, not far from Magdeburg.



Courtesy of Carsten Steger

The castle in Schwerin, today the seat of the State of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania's parliament

When a public holiday is on a Thursday, as is the case this year with the Day of German Unity, many working folks take the Friday off, too, to get a really long weekend. The Friday is called a "bridging day" ("Brückentag"), bridging the "gap" between days off work. Hence don't count on getting any administrative work done on such Fridays. This is not unique to Germany: the French, for example, have the same thing, they say "faire le pont".

Reformation Day

Germany is the country from which the reformation of the Catholic Church emanated, starting with Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses of criticism to the main portal of the Castle Cathedral in Wittenberg in the year 1517. The protests of the time, which led to the Reformation and protestant churches being founded, is commemorated in predominantly protestant regions of Germany, like Magdeburg, by a public holiday on Oct. 30.¹ The more Catholic regions (like Bavaria) celebrate "All Saints Day" on Nov. 1st instead.

Only an hour's train ride from Magdeburg, today's Wittenberg is well worth a visit.



Courtesy of A. Savin, Wikipedia

In Wittenberg, you can see the door of the church onto which Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses.

¹ Note how the words „protestant church“ contains the word “protest”, i.e. to this day these are the

churches of the protesters against the doctrine of the catholic church.

Oktoberfest (also in Magdeburg)

Oktoberfest began in Munich in 1810 to celebrate the most important royal wedding of the period. Originally a one-day event, it now starts in September to make use of the last warm days of Summer. It is the world's largest festival: last year (2023), some 7.2 million people from all over the world visit Munich to indulge in large tents to Bavarian music, traditional dishes – and yes, beer. Many people get dressed in traditional Bavarian clothing for the day's outing – leather shorts for gentlemen and checkered, knee-length skirts for ladies. You can pay anywhere between a hundred and a thousand Euros for such clothing. However, don't feel obliged to get dressed up in this manner, you're ok wearing everyday clothing like jeans to the event.

At major venues, you will have large, closed-off tents in which several hundred to a thousand or more people have reserved seating at benches and tables. There'll be a stage with non-stop "oom pah pah"-music played by a big band (you can find the link to an example of the music at the end of the Newsletter). Waitresses will be serving beer (in one-liter and half-liter glasses). There might even be a contest to see which waitress can carry the most one-liter glasses of beer at once – the world record is something like 18 (!).



Courtesy of Hans Lohrmann

The festival's influence extends far beyond Munich, with almost all cities and towns in Germany and many major centers around the world hosting their own celebrations, thereby promoting the Bavarian tradition.



While Munich's Oktoberfest is the global highlight, local festivals like Mückenwiesn from Sept. 21st to Oct. 6th in Magdeburg offer a more intimate yet equally festive experience. Located in the heart of Magdeburg, Mückenwiesn mixes Bavarian tradition with local charm, offering an eventful celebration for those who prefer it closer to home.



At Mückenwiesn, you can enjoy a variety of performances, from traditional folk music to modern acts. The admission fee is rather pricy (around 30 to 40 Euros per evening when featuring well-known musicians), but there are less pricy times, for example on Oct. 3rd at 5.50 Euros per person for a family event and on Oct. 4th at 16 Euros per person for a student event. Bavarian food and beverages at Oktoberfest are also not exactly cheap. But nonetheless it's an authentic way to have some fun and experience a bit of German culture first hand.



Courtesy of digital cat on Flickr

BiBa Calendar

Date(s)	Event / Deadline ...
Sept. 23–Oct. 4	Prep-Courses in Math and Programming
Thu., Oct. 3	Day of German Unity (Public Holiday)
Mon., Oct. 7, 10:30–11:30 am	Welcome Ceremony of the University, Opernhaus or G26-H1
Mon., Oct. 7, 1:00–4:00 am	Time Table Creation with Student Mentors
Tue., Oct. 8, 10:30–11:30 am	Introduction to the BiBa Degree Program
Oct. 7–11	OVGU Welcome Week
Mon., Oct. 14	First Day of Classes
Mon., Oct. 14, 5 pm	Welcome Reception for BiBas
Sa., Oct. 19, 9–12 am	Play handball in the Univ. Gym to get hyped up for the game
Sun., Oct. 20, 4:00 pm (tentative)	Field Trip to the SC Magdeburg Handball game against Leipzig
Nov. 15–30	Register for exams during the Winter Semester 2024/25
Fr., Nov. 28, 7 pm	Field Trip to the Christmas Market, Market Square
Thu., Dec. 19, 7:30 pm	BiBa Field Trip to a classical concert at the Opera House
Dec. 23, 2024 – Jan. 6, 2025	Christmas break (no classes)

Further Information

Ref.	Description	QR-Code
p. 3	Computer Science Dept., MUN	
p. 4	LUMAGICA Light-World in Elbauenpark	
p. 4	Culture Night in Magdeburg (translated website and program)	
p. 4	Urban Dance Festival	
p. 4	Day of German Unity 2024 celebrations in Schwerin	
p. 6	Oktoberfest Mückenwiesn (translated website and program)	
p. 6	Sample Oktoberfest “oom pah pah”-music	
p. 6	YouTube Video of a typical Oktoberfest	

About us, your BiBa Editorial Team

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P. 1 Flickr (*) picture of Memorial University; P. 3 small

P. 3 bottom right and p. 4 top left courtesy of Thomas

Strothotte, January 2024; bottom left courtesy of

Lourdes Peña-Castillo and Oscar Meruvia-Pastor; right

column images from top to bottom: Urban Dance

Festival webpage, Kulturnacht webpage, LUMAGICA

webpage, see URLs with further information; P. 6 top

left: courtesy of Hans Lohrmann on Pixabay; top right:

Oktoberfest 2023 in Munich, courtesy of Twisha Parmar;

bottom right: courtesy of digital cat on Flickr.

(*) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/memorialuniversity/albums/72157657819487914/>

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